ON FATHER'S SHOULDERS: RAYMOND CARVER AND HIS RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOLISM

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Introduction

Reading Raymond Carver's stories, even the ones dramatizing the most desperate situations such as "Why Don't You Dance?," the reader often experiences feelings of momentary transcendence from the characters' claustrophobic world. Yet, the problem here is that the specific reasons creating the very touch of transcendence are mostly hard to recognize. In "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," for example, though *some* sense of transcendence definitely comes at the very end where the protagonist, harried by his wife's infidelity, wonders at some physical changes coming over him, we do not clearly know what this change means, nor does the protagonist himself. Indeed, some of the most urgent concerns of most of Carver's fiction seem to be the characters' inability to recognize exactly what is happening to themselves, and no less importantly, the author's sympathy toward those very cognitive and linguistic limitations on their part. Carver thinks, as he repeatedly said on a number of occasions, that he cannot be "condescending" (Gentry and Stull 156) toward the characters in his own fiction.

Yet, allowing for the above circumstances, in some cases we should nevertheless be as precise as possible in examining the source of this impression. It is true, on the one hand, that Carver was a writer whose works in general seem to endorse the postmodernist indeterminacy—a characteristic of what Frederic Jameson calls "schizophrenic writing" (27)—preferring to leave some important things undecided

even at the very end; however, on the other hand, in interviews Carver frequently denounces the kind of fiction that has "no moral grounding" (Gentry and Stull 58). Carver, a student of John Gardner who wrote *On Moral Fiction*, was thus also a moral writer who had some definite morals to communicate, always tending toward what Kirk Nesset calls "a moral center" (8). Consequently, he, a writer who lived in a fragmented postmodern world in which any fixed meaning seems almost impossible to find, ended up producing radically fragmented texts while leaving, nevertheless, enough textual information for the willing reader to have some "morals" specifically determined: a kind of fiction which Stull defines as belonging to "Humanist Realism" (8) tradition.

In this essay, in light of the discussion above, I will explore as specifically as possible the reason why he could stop drinking, as the exploring process itself faithfully parallels the process of reading those very texts which purportedly dramatize his own difficult recovery from alcoholism. I'm not in the least concerned here with, of course, the *clinical* reason that Carver quit drinking but with the reason *he thought after the recovery* he could quit drinking. Though many critics have so far tried to probe into the circumstances in terms of religion, or of his communal experience at the AA meetings, I will contend that there must have been much more realistically urgent reason for his actual recovery process than has been assumed so far. Judging from his own various accounts, alcoholism was definitely one of the most important and difficult problems in Carver's life. Then, the situation in which he could kick his chronic drinking habit must have influenced his writing in some significant ways, and this must have much to do with the way his texts often operate in an almost enigmatic "syntax of silence" (Clarke 103). If it was extremely difficult for Carver to kick his alcoholism, then it naturally follows that the process of recovery depicted in his fiction will become just as difficult for both the suffering characters themselves and the reader to trace step by step, enacted as some silent psychological dramas of relentless repression and awareness hidden deep below the surface of the texts.

Carver, very specifically, even bafflingly so, locates the time and the place he stopped drinking as June 2nd, 1977, in McKinleyville, California; he and his ex-wife Maryann were then living together there in a house rented out from a chef of a nearby restaurant. Taking this as a cue, firstly I will try to specify what to make of this super-specific locating act of his alcohol-quitting situation. Next, taking advantage of what we gain through a detailed analysis of "Bicycles, Muscles, Cigaretts" written around 1972, I will try to specify the reason why Carver could quit drinking. Lastly, we will briefly look at two thematically-related stories, which will reinforce and further develop the assumptions made in the previous sections. The two stories are: "Where I'm Calling From," modeled on Duffy's, a rehab center where Carver stayed two times in 1976 and 1977 to kick his alcoholism but could not actually do so; and most importantly, "Chef's House," the setting of which is strongly evocative of the place where Carver lived after Duffy's and finally succeeded in quitting alcohol. Needless to say, my ultimate goal here is not merely to put some missing pieces of Carver's autobiographical jigsaw-puzzle in their right positions, but, most importantly, to read his fiction in a fuller way, getting as close as possible to the "core" of "Raymond Carver": a fictional character seen, sympathized with, and speculated upon through some given textual evidence.

1

Recovery from alcoholism was one of the most momentous events in Carver's life, or at least he seemed to think so, as is shown in one of his interviews: "I had my last drink on June 2, 1977. I'm more proud of that than of any other accomplishment in my life" (Gentry and Stull 77). Indeed, his whole career has been usually understood to be divided into two significant periods: the "pre-recovery" period and the "post-recovery" one. In the same interview, he talks of the two significant events in his life:

I won't deny the fact that you sometimes get desperate by being

> forced into certain kind of jobs just to survive. But my own experience is that you try to make the best of it. That's not to say that in this kind of situation you don't hope for some sort of salvation, for a moment of insight, for a revelation that gives your life a new turn. At times like that, your whole life changes. It's happened to me twice: when I started drinking, and when I decided to stop. (Gentry and Stull 80, emphasis mine)

Reading such comments as I quote here, the reader can hear almost Paul-like religious overtones of spiritual re-generation; he says here that he had a "revelation" "twice" in his life. Never meaning to underestimate the poignancy of these accounts, I myself think that in some important ways these have to be taken not so much literally but as kinds of symbolic gestures to dramatically celebrate in retrospect his recovery from alcoholism, in a born-again Christian-like fashion. What we can know for sure from these comments are that, in short, the liquor-quitting event was tremendously important for him, and that it involved some kind of "revelation" to him, a new outlook on the world in general, which probably even bordered on being religious. We can also speculate here, furthermore, that to Carver the two different "revelations" concerning the beginning and the end of his drinking must have been in some way or other similar enough in nature to allow him to speak about both of them all in one breath: it is logical for us to think here that the *second* "revelation" must have been concerned in some radical way or other with the *resolution* of the very problem that came with the *first* "revelation," the one that had driven him to heavy drinking.

Now, according to Carver's own account, the time he "began to drink heavily" was when "I'd realized that the things I'd wanted most in life for myself and my writing, and my wife and my children, were simply not going to happen" (Gentry and Stull 37). Another account of his about the time when he stood waiting at a laundromat for his turn to do the washing of the dirty underclothes of his children is as follows: "at that moment, in the laundromat, I realized that this [the hope that

he can get what he wants in his life] simply was not true" (*Fires* 33). Comparing these two, we can conclude symbolically yet specifically enough that the time he had the *first* "revelation" was when he was lining up at a laundromat and was given an "insight" (*Fires* 33). The point here is that, imagining how "at that moment" he must have been struck with the dismal prospects of his future as an aspiring writer, we can very vividly surmise that this most mundane of all events must have embodied a kind of truth bleak enough to drive him to heavy-drinking: the weight of the responsibility to support his children.

Nevertheless, rather strangely, Carver remained enigmatically obscure until the end of his life as to the *second* "revelation." This mystification has led one critic to seek, though fully aware that Carver frequently denies directly religious influence of any kind on his writing, some religious reasons for his liquor-quitting in his fiction, based on the examination of the fictional influence of his involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous, a basically though not strictly Christian organization. He argues that Carver must have experienced "something" (Wriglesworth 463) religious in nature in the AA meetings, which generally requires the participants to totally abandon themselves to the power of God. Indeed, in the later stages of his career Carver's fiction tended more and more toward the Catholic way of understanding the world, as is well demonstrated, for example, in a famous scene of "A Small Good Thing," where a couple, as if in an obvious allusion to the Eucharist ritual to mourn for the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, share a meal solemnly with a baker after the tragic death of their son.[1]

Yet, in light of the extremely *secular* nature of the *first* "revelation" we have already discussed, we must not be too hasty in conjecturing the reasons for his alcohol-quitting directly in terms of his "religious" experience; rather, here I think it is more advisable for us to assume that the *second* "revelation" was also definitely something tremendously important for him, something which was comparable in its impact even to some Christian revelations to be sure, yet not so general and abstract as some orthodox Christian faith suggests; indeed, when talking about the source for his fiction at all Carver always

retained some distance from what he thought the AA meetings gave him (Gentry and Stull 115).

Thus, under these circumstances we had better consider the situation in more secular terms here as follows: sometime in 1977 there must have been some Paul- or Augustine-like revolutionary change of realistically specific kind in his awareness as to his relationship with his children, which nevertheless he could not specify in public comments for some private reason or other. Though critics like Cochrane, for example, convincingly enough emphasize the general importance of "community and narrative" (83) in alcoholics' usual process of recovery, I believe this kind of general explanation will, though cogent in its own way, never fully clarify why none other than Carver, an individual with his own idiosyncratic life-history, could stop drinking; in Carver's specific case, there must have been just as specific reasons behind it. In light of this context, let us carefully read one of his "pre-recovery" stories, "Bicycles, Muscles, Cigaretts," which was supposedly written around 1972.

2

"Bicycles, Muscles, Cigaretts" begins with an everyday conversation of an ordinary couple about the husband's struggle to quit smoking, which actually began only two days before the narrated present; the wife, a success herself in a similar attempt, encourages the husband not to give up the effort halfway because, as she fully knows "the second day is the hardest. The third day is hard, too, of course, but from then on, if you can stay with it that long, you're over the hump" (*Where I'm Calling From* 21). In the meantime, an unfamiliar boy comes to visit their house at suppertime, telling them that their only son Roger got involved with some trouble: according to the boy's account, his brother's bicycle is missing, as to which Roger and some other boys supposedly involved in the case are now being questioned at his home.

The boy (whose family name, Miller, will later be given) asks either one of the parents to come follow him, and after some discussion

with his wife Hamilton, the husband, decides to go. Following the ensuing discussion at the boy's home where his mother and some strange boys gather around the kitchen table, Hamilton, somewhat edgy probably on account of the lack of nicotine, gets himself involuntarily involved in a bad fight with another boy's father, a tough-looking man named Berman with a crew-cut, who arrived at the scene later. Hamilton, to his own amazement, gets the upper hand in the violent fight.

While talking with his son about the incident on their way home, Hamilton very vividly remembers seeing his own father, a feeble-looking man, having a bad fight with a farmhand in a café. For some reason not stated, back home at bedside the son enthusiastically asks the father whether his grandfather was also "strong like you" (*Where* 32) and the father replies in the positive. The boy, getting unusually excited and wistful, expresses his feelings of lonesomeness for not being able to communicate with Hamilton on equal terms. Talking with his son like this, Hamilton notices that somehow his finger no longer smells of tobacco as it did before. Saying a tender good-night to his son, Hamilton goes out of the bedroom, leaving the door half open.

This story has an unmistakably positive mood; to begin with, the overall tone is tender by any usual Carver standard: though never specified, the Hamiltons seem to be white-collar people, in no desperate need of money as ordinary Carver characters are; the father is incomparably reasonable and responsible by that standard, and the son's words introduced toward the end also indicate that there is definitely a sense of consummated communication between the father and the son. Typically, Arthur Saltzman argues as to the ending of the story as follows:

> Hamilton's decision to close the door halfway symbolizes a compromise between the innocence he desires for his son and the confusing adult world from which he cannot always protect him. But communication has been established and the door between them remains open. Hamilton's compassion leavens the painful

process of growing up; it also confers upon this father an exalted status in Carver's world. (65)

Saltzman's intention here cannot be clearer: this is simply a heartwarming story about the delicate father-son relationship, which "ranks among the most moving in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*" (64).

However, if we take both the fictional situations in the story and Carver's own autobiographical situations into full consideration, we have to conclude that Saltzman here is merely skimming the surface of the entire emotional drama actually enacted in the story: in fact something far more positive is being at stake here. Carver, with his own particular life history, could not have written this story without a kind of grave poignancy.

Carver is famous for using, though indirectly, his own experience in his fiction; indeed, he says of the relationship between autobiography and fiction that "the fiction I'm most interested in ... strikes me as autobiographical to some extent" (Gentry and Stull 41). Lainsbury, going further in this vein, even states that writing fiction for Carver was itself a kind of attempt to work out "his sense of ambivalence about the lives he has had" (99). It goes without saying, of course, that making too much of autography in understanding fiction is always a dangerous thing; Carver himself very definitely warns against the kind of fiction-writing which is too heavily dependent upon autobiography, when he says that "unless you're a special kind of writer and a very talented one, it's dangerous to try and write volume after volume The Story of My Life" (Gentry and Stull 41). Nevertheless, on the whole his emphasis as a writer was always strongly on the importance of first-hand experience, arguing that "[a]s far as I'm concerned, the best art has its reference points in real life" or even "everything we write is, in some way, autobiographical" (Gentry and Stull 18; 41).

Thus, following the footsteps of Lainsbury, I think that what we must never forget in reading this story is that it begins with a couple's discussion designed to help break the husband's tenacious addiction to

smoking and ends with his unexpected success in the attempt. Though, generally speaking, alcohol and cigarettes might be miles apart in terms of their immediate influence on family lives, both can lead to addictions which are very difficult to kick; when the addictions become seriously debilitating, they must by all means be abandoned to save the sufferers' and their relatives' lives. Indeed, it was not alcohol but cigarettes that finally killed Carver through his eventual contraction of lung cancer.

Though Carver's own alcoholism seems not to have reached its nadir at the time he was writing this story, sometime around 1972–1973, according to his ex-wife Maryann he had already started drinking heavily by then (243–46); furthermore, Carver's father and many of the people he knew had long suffered from the destructive effects of the insidious habit which still had not yet been called "alcoholism" then, making it hard for the people surrounding them, including young Carver himself, to maintain any manageable family lives. In one of Carver's supposedly semi-autobiographical poems, "The Kitchen," the young narrator tells of a critical situation in which he, coming home, finds his father sitting on a sofa with a woman he does not know, both heavily drunk:

> She tried to grin as she rose
> to her feet. My dad stayed where he was, staring at me
> as if he didn't recognize his own get. *Here,*
> *what is it, boy?* he said. *What happened,*
> *son?* Swaying against the sink, the woman wet her lips
> and waited for whatever was to happen next.
> (*A New Path to the Waterfall* 38)

Such a familial situation as is surmised from this poem has induced Lainsbury to call Carver's own childhood house a "madhouse" (101); indeed, in his autobiographical essay "My Father's Life" Carver portrays the life of his childhood family in a similar vein, though many biographical accounts including this very "My Father's Life" amply

show that Carver nevertheless genuinely loved his father (*Fires* 13–21). According to Maryann, when she first met him, what he said he "loved most in this world" was none other than his father (5). We can easily imagine here that young Carver, with his genuine love toward his father, must have seriously thought about why some people end up being desperately addicted to something at all, and quite often wished poignantly his beloved father could possibly quit drinking; and now, in turn, he himself was also on his way to become a full-fledged alcoholic.

Thus, Carver had already had, when writing this story, all-too-abundant first-hand knowledge and some understanding of his own about what addiction was all about. How can we, then, miss the implications that this story, in which a father actually succeeds in quitting smoking, could possibly have had for him? Was not Carver, when writing this story of a father's casual success in kicking an addiction, thinking about his own, or his father's, far more dangerous one which in the case of Carver himself, according to Maryann, got seriously debilitating during the period he worked as a lecturer at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop, 1972–1973? As I have already touched upon, this story is roughly estimated to have been written around that time, first published in *Kansas Quarterly* in 1973. Should we not read this story, then, as a sort of a vicariously fictive chronicle of how he seriously thought he should do under the ominous pressures of the accelerating alcoholism, in order to successfully keep off a deadly habit that tormented his beloved father? Is the white-collar setting of the story itself also indicative of his keen awareness of fictional distance from the happy family life depicted therein, which he himself had desperately hoped for but could never have?

In this context, "Bicycles," a "pre-recovery" story, in many ways suggestively offers us a significant perspective on the nature of the *second* "revelation" referred to in the previous section, the specific contents of which will fully be shown later in the discussion of "Chef's House." From the next section on, reading these and other related stories and poems, we can see that the *second* "revelation" must have enabled Carver to have a radically different worldview than he had had before.

To conclude first, I believe he could quit drinking all because, through the impact of the *second* "revelation," the *first* "revelation" as to his life with his children proved to have been radically wrong; his two children were in fact never such an unnecessary burden as hindered his career, but rather the very entities that held the key to what he probably cherished most in this world: the emotional connection to his father. This had much to do with a way of thinking of the world in terms not of typical American Individualism which, applied in a familial situation, emphasizes each family member's own self-reliance, but of a kind of inter-generational co-dependency: a close three-generation Grandfather-Father(Mother)-Son(Daughter) continuity. For the lack of a more appropriate term, let me tentatively call it here, with a nod toward its Catholic connotation, the Familial Holy Trinity. Carver's apparent post-recovery approach toward Catholicism must also necessarily be reconsidered in this context.

If we examine carefully Carver's stories in this context, I think we will find that many otherwise merely fragmented elements somehow cohere to make a convincingly consistent whole, centered around a core problem which was supposedly the most important to Carver all throughout his life.[2] Indeed, Carver himself definitely says in *Fires*: "I have to say that the greatest single influence on my life, and on my writing, directly and indirectly, has been my two children" (31). What I'm offering in this essay is, therefore, merely a kind of initial attempt to examine the problem.

3

Let us now return to the detailed analysis of "Bicycles." What is significant is that, though earlier in the story Hamilton complained, after two days of abstinence, of his fingers strongly smelling of nicotine, now near at the end of the story he finds that he can't smell anything on his hands:

Hamilton sniffed the hand and then the fingers. "Now I can't

smell anything, either," he said. "It was there before, but now it's gone." Maybe it was scared out of me, he thought. (*Where* 32, emphasis mine)

We can soundly assume, as many critics have likewise done, that this passage dramatizes the protagonist's unexpected success in breaking free of his nicotine addiction. However, here he does not seem to be particularly pleased with the long-awaited change; the narrator reporting the scene is, also, so casual and unassuming in telling about it, and the dialogue here so emotionally charged, that virtually no critic has paid any sustained attention to the issue.

What can be the cause for this change in him? Because the narrator never offers the reason for what is happening in the story, the reader is basically left in the dark until the very end; moreover, the warm exchange of emotions between father and son further obscures the theme of nicotine addiction in the first place. Yet, what if we can see that he changes in some other important, radical ways than in his hands and fingers not smelling of nicotine anymore? Might the change not help us explain his bafflingly mysterious nicotine-kicking process?

If addiction in general is not so much a mere strong preference for some particular things in themselves as a *bodily* symptom reflecting some hidden *mental* problems, then the change in Hamilton, if at all, is very likely to have something to do with his addiction to nicotine. Indeed, his dependence on nicotine here is clearly depicted to have much to do with his psychological insecurity, as is suggested in the scene where he unconsciously reaches into his shirt pocket for a cigarette when suddenly confronted by Berman's ominously secret conference with his son (*Where* 27). To begin with, Carver very frequently staged obvious fictional correspondences between the characters' bodily phenomena and their inner psyche; for example, in the story "Careful," the protagonist's actual loss of hearing embodies his emotional crisis over the impending breakup of his marriage.

Now, critics seem to have taken for granted that Hamilton is throughout the story a responsibly sympathetic, though emotionally

unstable, father; indeed, he acts as the representative of the Hamiltons at the Millers' house, sympathetically defending the honor of his son; he responsibly admonishes his son not to damage people's property on any account; both of these are seemingly moral gestures worthy of a loving father. Yet, on closely reading the text we can see that initially Hamilton was never the responsible, caring father we encounter at the end. On this matter, rather, it is fair to say that he actually *grows up* in the story in some important sense.[3]

In the beginning, when he is asked out after being informed that his own son Roger is in a "jam" (*Where* 22), Hamilton seems, if anything, more troubled out of his own immediate concerns than genuinely worried about Roger:

> "Is he all right?" Ann Hamilton [Hamilton's wife] said and took her apron off.
>
> "Sure, he's all right." Hamilton looked at her and shook his head.
>
> "It sounds like just a childish argument, and the boy's mother's getting herself involved."
>
> "Do you want me to go?" Ann Hamilton asked.
>
> He thought for a minute. "Yes, I'd rather you went, but I'll go. Just hold dinner until we're back. We shouldn't be long." (*Where* 22)

On the surface this might seem an innocent conversation between a caring father and a mother about their son in trouble; as to the initial unwillingness Hamilton here expresses toward going, too, we can interpret favorably that here he says so simply because he is informed that the other party involves a "mother," not a "father." Yet, in fact this passage is revealing enough concerning Hamilton's casual assumptions as to his own son's social activities. Indeed, he calls the accident, rather hastily, "just a childish argument" which he assumes will not take long to solve, well before he ever finds out anything as to its nature: his own son, supposedly, willfully taking part in collectively

damaging his friend's bicycle (though the truth as to the matter is never revealed even at the end). In short, here Hamilton simply assumes that *his* son, of all boys, will not do anything seriously destructive to others, which demonstrates a serious lack of knowledge on Hamilton's part concerning not only his son but also, more importantly, himself: ironically, Hamilton himself will shortly lose his temper and end up in a violent fight with Berman, nearly killing him.

Here he also seems to assume that boys should solve their own problems on their own, and accordingly parents should not interfere. This, of course, would never be an attitude which in itself is particularly blamable; if anything, it is necessary to inculcate the importance of self-reliance and self-defense in children, especially in a country like America. Yet in the context of this particular story, in which something so serious as a child's theft or damaging other people's property *might* actually be involved, we can never simply let it go at that.

Indeed, if we stop here and think about the order in which the story is placed in the collection *Where I'm Calling From*, the possible implication of child neglect will inevitably be brought into clearer relief here. The way the stories are arranged in the collection is suggestive of some thematic unity, for it seems to trace in fictionally loose terms Carver's own biographical development: the collection starts with a bleaker, childhood story "Nobody Said Anything" and ends with "Errand," a more generous story about the death of an old world-famous writer. "Bicycles" is, in that overall thematic unity, the second story, immediately after "Nobody Said Anything," a grotesquely sad one depicting how a lonely boy is unmercifully neglected by both of his parents in a bleak household. There are seventeen stories in *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, no less than twelve of which went into *Where*, and these two stories in question were not arranged next to each other in the original collection *Will You Pease?*; these facts somehow suggest at least *some* significant thematic connection between the two.

Allowing for the above discussion, it is reasonable to conclude that up until the narrative present Hamilton, though probably having been a responsible and kind father in his own way, has never given any

serious considerations to his son, who has had *his own* poignant concerns. If Carver once really thought, as we saw, that his children were a hindrance to his ambition seemingly unsurmountable enough to drive him to heavy drinking, then he could not have paid as much attention to his children as was necessary. Hamilton here is never like the evidently unmerciful father in "Nobody," nor like the frustratedly virulent one in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" to be sure; however, the question here is not so much how the father thinks about the father-son relationship but how the son feels and thinks about his father. If something went wrong, Hamilton *might* at any time become like those negligent fathers ubiquitously found in Carver Country.

Indeed, preoccupied mainly with his own impending problems of nicotine addiction, at the start of the story in the kitchen Hamilton appears more like a son than a father, cared about and encouraged warmly to persevere in his addiction-kicking effort by his mother-like wife, Ann. Momentarily free of heavy parental obligations of which Carver himself very often lamented, the couple in the peaceful kitchen seems to be living in a kind of prelapsarian paradise meant only for the husband to kick his addiction. Yet, when a strange boy enters the scene, bringing some troublesome news about his son, he has to seriously reconsider his egotistic assumptions as to not only his son but also himself.

Hamilton is now escorted by the strange boy to his house at the end of a dead-end street in an unfamiliar neighborhood. That Hamilton does not know the neighborhood which is not very far from his own house, is another sign that he has been living mainly in an insulated world of his own, having never seriously thought about "the range of his son's personal life" (*Where* 23). Somewhat evocative of Hemingway's "Indian Camp" in which a father quite unexpectedly encounters in a far-off Indian camp some violence to which he, though until then an authority-figure to his son, Nick, does not know how to properly react, Hamilton, following the strange boy into his house, also encounters unexpected violence: a fight with another boy's father. Though little critical comparison between the two stories seems to have been made so

far, the parallelism is evident enough.

What sets "Bicycles" definitely apart from "Indian Camp" is, however, Hamilton's response toward his own experience: after the unexpected encounter with violence, Hamilton reflects pensively, and therefore learns from it, though mostly unconsciously, much more than Nick's father apparently does from his. While Nick's father, a doctor by trade, tries hastily to rationalize his experience in terms of the makeshift binary opposition of genders, Hamilton never does anything of the sort; when he gets home, after sending Roger into the house, he sits on the front porch and broods deeply over what the fight associatively brings back in his mind:

> He had once seen his father—a pale, slow-talking man with slumped shoulders—in something like this. It was a bad one, and both men had been hurt. It had happened in a café. The other man was a farmhand. Hamilton had loved his father and could recall many things about him. But now he recalled his father's one fistfight as if it were all there was to the man. (*Where* 31)

Most critics argue that this passage expresses Hamilton's negative feelings toward the one shameful memory about his father, as we can see, for example, in the argument below:

> Here Hamilton knows that, while his son might love him at the moment, the boy will eventually remember very little about his father .... Evan is sorry to have continued the legacy of making a fistfight one of the most vivid of those memories. (Meyer 61, emphasis mine)

Despite many critics' simple misunderstanding like the typical one shown above that Hamilton here, ashamed, can hardly remember anything about his father except for his one shameful fistfight, what the narrator is actually saying here is that, though Hamilton can definitely recall many good things about his beloved father, the scene of his

fistfight is incomparably vivid and meaningful among them. Let us quote here one of Carver's poems supposedly about his own father:

> *October*. Here in this dank, unfamiliar kitchen
> I study my father's embarrassed young man's face.
> Sheepish grin, he holds in one hand a string
> of spiny yellow perch, in the other
> a bottle of Carlsberg beer.
> In jeans and flannel shirt, he leans
> against the front fender of a 1934 Ford.
> He would like to pose brave and hearty for his posterity,
> wear his old hat cockeyed over his ear.
> All his life father wanted to be bold.
>
> But the eyes give him away, and the hands
> that limply offer the string of dead perch
> and the bottle of beer. Father, I love you,
> yet how can I say thank you, I who can't hold my liquor either
> and don't even know the places to fish? (*Fires* 59, emphasis mine)

Reading such lines as these, which amply show Carver's keen appreciation for what "boldness" must have meant to his father, we cannot but conclude that in the quoted passage above Hamilton is not so much ashamed of his father's fight nor even sorry for his own act, but simply awestruck with the immensity of what the one all-too vivid memory of his father *now* represents to him: the sheer weight of being a man.

Hamilton might have remembered the scene in which his father was actually "bold" some times before, but now it has come to signify something far more serious; here Hamilton is being, probably for the first time in his life, truly sympathetic toward his father, as is represented in the way the narrator calls Hamilton's father: "the man," not "his father" (*Where* 31). By enabling him to grasp the "entire weight" (Clarke 103) of his father's existence as a man mysteriously crystallized into the one striking image, Hamilton's fighting experience

endows him with some visceral knowledge about his father, and consequently also with a new self-awareness. His love toward his father before was, in comparison, a naïve kind of love; he can *now* see the hidden secret of being a "man": a life, to use the phrase of the narrator in "The Fling," always on the verge of falling into an "abyss" (*Furious Seasons* 62). Indeed, Hamilton says to Roger that his father sometimes got "depressed" (*Where* 32); Hamilton's father's actual feelings in those spells of depression must have been blind spots in Hamilton's understanding of his father up until then, yet he knows now that this was the reason for *his father's* addiction to cigarettes.

If this story resembles Hemingway's "Indian Camp," a strongly misogynistic story, the theme of gender difference I brought up here is highly relevant; the fact that the wife, seemingly having more authority than Hamilton in the household, is no more than a foil throughout the story might be suggestive enough[4]; at least for Hamilton this *is* a men's world. Let us quote here a passage from "Dummy," the original version of "The Third Thing That Killed My Father Off":

> For me, Dummy's death signalled the end of my extraordinarily long childhood, sending me forth, ready or not, into the world of men—where defeat and death are more in the natural order of things. (*Furious Seasons* 9, emphasis mine)

Here the narrator apparently in his adulthood offers, in describing how the process of his father's emotional and physical collapse started with the death of his friend Dummy, exactly what "the world of men" means for him now: "defeat and death." Hamilton in "Bicycles" won the fight, to be sure, but the fact is never anything merely to be either proud of or ashamed of, because he could have actually killed or been killed in it. Indeed, Hamilton himself says as follows: "it's hard to say what people will do when they are angry" (*Where* 30).

Now it naturally follows that Hamilton, himself once a child who probably idolized his father, can deeply sympathize with his son, too; and if so, consequently he can now at last seriously consider what it

really means to be a father. In this context, the verb that the narrator uses to depict how Hamilton himself fell onto the lawn with Berman is significant; the narrator tells that Hamilton "rolled" (*Where* 29) onto the lawn with Berman, urging the reader to make a loose equation between Hamilton and Roger, who says he "roll[ed]" (*Where* 25) his friend's bicycle.[5] The reader can imagine here that, just as Hamilton as a man could not possibly keep himself from "rolling" Berman, Roger, either, could not have kept himself from acting that way, all because he is a boy; in the world of the boys depicted here, the weight of being males seems to have already started to bear upon them, as is evident in the scene where the boys box with each other imitating the two fighting adults (*Where* 29).

Thus, what Roger abruptly says in the final sequence cuts unconsciously to the deepest core of the story:

> "Dad? You'll think I'm pretty crazy, but I wish I'd known you when you were little .... I don't know how to say it, but I'm lonesome about it ...." (*Where* 33)

What are aptly epitomized as the story's most urgent concerns here in Roger's apparently childish remark are the pain, fear, and loneliness a male unavoidably feels, and the male's hope for another male of the same family lineage to share them. Hamilton here is of course never the exception; seeing his own father and another man both hurt in a bad fistfight, the young Hamilton must have felt "lonesome" vaguely just as Roger does here. Since then, he must have long harbored the inarticulate "lonesome" feelings within himself; those feelings must have been gradually intensifying with each everyday situation where his masculinity was likewise challenged in some way or other, continually pushing him inch by inch toward mental insecurity. Indeed, seeing that at the beginning his household seems to be dominated by his wife, it is reasonable to assume that he must have been suffering from some sense or other of being emasculated, as Carver's father is also symbolically shown in the poem quoted before in this essay to have

been with his "dead" perch and "a bottle of Carlsberg."

However, now Hamilton is fully ready to assume the responsibility as a father, one assumed also by his own father, thus unconsciously yet solidly establishing an emotional tie in a trans-generational male family line: the Familial Holy Trinity consisting of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Grandfather). In hindsight, we can speculate that Hamilton, unsure of his own masculiniity, must have always been in need of this sense of security, of fully belonging to the male line of his family. The text, thus, amply suggests that this *is* the reason why he has developed an addiction; now he can quit it because at last he becomes genuinely confident of the connection with his father through unconsciously becoming an authentically responsible father to Roger. In this sense, Hamilton's son is now never a burden as Carver himself once assumed, bringing Hamilton enough connection to his father he craves. In this context, the way Hamilton behaves toward Roger near the end is suggestive:

> "He [Hamilton's father] started smoking a pipe before he died, that's true," Hamilton said. "He used to smoke cigarettes a long time ago and then he'd get depressed with something or other and quit, but later he'd change brands and start in again. Let me show you something," Hamilton said. "Smell the back of my hand." The boy took the hand in his, sniffed it, and said, "I guess I don't smell anything, Dad. What is it?" (*Where* 32)

Though Hamilton's offering his hands for Roger to sniff might seem merely casual, far more might be involved here. Let us look ahead at the next passage from "Boxes" written in 1986, in which the narrator, while talking on the phone with his neurotic mother, suddenly remembers how his father used to tenderly address his mother:

> "Are you still there?" My mother asks. "I wish you'd say something."
>
> I don't know why, but it's then I recall the affectionate name

> my dad used sometimes when he was talking nice to my mother—those times, that is, when he wasn't drunk. It was a long time ago, and I was a kid, but always, hearing, I felt better, less afraid, more hopeful about the future. "Dear," he'd say. He called her "dear" sometimes—a sweet name. "Dear," he'd say, "if you're going to the store, will you bring me some cigarettes?" Or "Dear, is your cold any better?" "Dear, where is my coffee cup?"
>
> The word issues from my lips before I can think what else I want to say to go along with it. "Dear." I say it again. I call her "dear." "Dear, try not to be afraid," I say. (*Where* 424)

If we can feel here that the protagonist is having a momentary yet definite spiritual communion with his mother by deliberately assuming his father's role, we can also imagine that in the quoted passage above Hamilton might be enacting what he remembers his father actually used to do for him; though the narrator never provides the details, Hamilton here must be wanting to show to his son how his own father's hands, just like his own, used to smell of tobacco.

Only, we must never forget one important thing here; as is clear from the above discussion, in "Bicycles" females are portrayed as having little to do with what males hold dear: his wife Ann is too two-dimensional to be any part of the Trinity, so is Mrs. Miller. When compared with what Carver will dramatize later in "Where I'm Calling From" and "Chef's House" we will shortly discuss, we can postulate that this lack of communication between sexes, as compared with the potential good effects of successful communication between different generations of males, is what Carver himself was consistently obsessed with during the years of his progressive alcoholism. He must have thought, under the influence of approaching alcoholism, that though he did not feel manly and confident enough beside his wife, he would nevertheless be able to feel secure if only he could be a good father to his son. He must have struggled very hard to be one as is fictionally dramatized in "Bicycles"; however, in fact, his alcoholism further intensified, and consequently his relationship with his son worsened,

too. He comments about this period as follows: "I made a wasteland out of everything I touched" (Gentry and Stull 38). There must have been many reasons behind this, of course, but as far as we can judge from his fiction it must have been most importantly because of this heavily-gendered nature of the supposed Familial Holy Trinity, which we can easily imagine must have occasioned numerous serious conflicts with the female members of the Carver household: the wife and the daughter. In the next section, therefore we will see how this defective model of the all-male Familial Holy Trinity will be radically revised.

4

For some, especially in a country like America where a Benjamin Franklin- or Emerson-like ideal of self-reliance or willingness to break with tradition has historically taken root as *the* virtue in people's psyche, the sense of connection with his/her parents or children might mean, as in the case of Fitzgerald's Gatsby, nothing more than an unnecessary burden. To an American critic like Lainsbury, for example, accordingly, the mother in "Boxes" I lightly touched upon in the previous chapter might appear merely as "greedy" and "small-hearted"; she is, to him, no more than a person who is never willing to take any "responsibility" for "her own happiness," annoyingly trying to get in the way between her son and his present girlfriend (120–21).

Yet, this line of thinking will never take the reader to the heart of Carver Country, whose apparently mutually-isolated landscapes are in fact nevertheless all penetrated with Carver's own reticent yet deep-seated yearnings for cross-generational family ties. Thus, readers can never be said to be reading a story like "Boxes" at all, unless they understand that the narrator, though she annoys him with her eccentricities, nevertheless loves his neurotic mother far more than his girlfriend, Jill; the girlfriend is here portrayed as a self-centered person who prefers looking at a catalog for nice curtains to seriously thinking about her boyfriend's complex feelings toward his mother, his cherished memory of his father, or any other things that those represent.

Thus, we are now ready to see, by looking at "Where I'm Calling From" and "Chef's House," that what Carver thought actually happened to himself in 1977 must have been similar in nature to Hamilton's experience, though with striking differences concerning the members of the supposed Familial Holy Trinity.[6] In "Where I'm Calling From," the narrator, a recovering alcoholic, after witnessing his friend J. P. leaving with his wife from the rehab center the narrator is also staying at, for no apparent reason remembers a scene from his past in which he looked out the window of his bedroom:

> I push the curtain away from the window. Outside, this old guy in white coveralls is standing next to his ladder. The sun is just starting to break above the mountains. The old guy and I look each other over. It's the landlord, all right—this old guy in coveralls. But his coveralls are too big for him. He needs a shave, too. And he's wearing this baseball cap to cover his bald head. Goddamn it, I think, if he isn't a weird old fellow. And a wave of happiness comes over me that I'm not him—that I'm me and that I'm inside this bedroom with my wife ....
>
> I let go of the curtain. But I keep standing there at the window. I can see the old fellow nod to himself like he's saying, "Go on, sonny, go back to bed. I understand." (*Where* 295)

Here, especially for us, the dawning revelation concerning the male trans-generational relationship and his concomitant recovery from alcoholism are modestly implied by many textual signs: the opening of the curtain, the break of the sunlight above the mountains, and the waves of happiness he feels when he sees the landlord, despite his apparently mischievous feelings toward him. The narrator, who of course is no son of his, is now imagining the old man is understandingly calling him "sonny," mildly indicating that the protagonist is here on the verge of realizing how important the relationship with *his own father* has been. Indeed, though this story is full of such impressive father-figures as the paternalistic supervisor Frank Martin, J. P.'s

father, and this landlord, the narrator never even once mentions his own father; this naturally leads us to suspect he must have been repressing many things he really has to think about, as if in a textbook case of psychological displacement. The hidden yet *real* reason why the narrator is suffering from alcoholism seems to lie around here.

In this line, looking backward to "Bicycles" and forward to "Chef's House," we have to go still further to assume that this near-revelation the narrator here seems to be experiencing is now working on still deeper strata of his unconscious, pushing him toward the most important problem from which he has supposedly been running away: the existence of, and his strong love and guilt toward, his own child(ren). Though the narrator's child(ren)'s existence is never even once mentioned in "Where" except in a displaced manner when, for example, he spitefully speaks about the "mouthy kid" (*Where* 296) of his girlfriend, we can speculate here not only that he himself has one(s) but also that the untold relationship with his child (ren) must be the main reason for the narrator's alcoholism. Furuya convincingly argues, pointing out that the narrator is sympathetic especially toward J. P. who has a wife and children, that "it seems reasonable to think that he [the narrator] has some [children]" (111). The difficult love-guilt relationship between a father and his children will be introduced in "Chef's House" as the central theme of the story, which fictionally dramatizes the next major move Carver actually made after he left Duffy's in 1977. The story is, suggestively enough, placed immediately after the title story in *Where I'm Calling From*, a fact which strongly encourages us to consider the two as companion pieces; indeed, "Chef's House" begins with a recovering alcoholic calling up his wife, a gesture that logically follows the ending of "Where": a husband cannot decide whether to call up his wife or his girlfriend. The way the recovering alcoholic is depicted in "Chef's House" is, furthermore, especially significant in our context: he is a strongly repressive person, who tries, though in vain, to exclude his children from his consciousness because of his strong love and guilt toward them.[7]

Yet, in "Where" the narrator cannot face the issue either of his child(ren) or his father; still, he still has one striking glimmer of hope: the connection with his wife. Though completely insulated in every other respect, he at least openly wants communication with his wife. As I touched upon above, whether he calls up his wife or his girlfriend in the end remains undecided in the text, yet for us it seems a decided matter: in "Chef's House" the wife, not the girlfriend, comes to help the husband. In "Chef's House," then, she will never be like the two-dimensional wife in "Bicycles"; indeed, she, herself an awkward yet sincere narrator, actively gives the one final touch to the husband's difficult endeavors to establish the Trinity. "Chef's House," thus symbolically yet most faithfully in all of Carver's stories documents the actual process of his recovery from alcoholism; what we found in the preceding analysis of "Bicycles" and "Where" is here further developed into a more realistically plausible form of trans-generational family relationship. The fact that the story is fictionally set in the house Carver rented from a chef of a nearby restaurant in McKinleyville, where he, through the devoted help of his ex-wife, could actually quit drinking for good on June 2, 1977, is of course significant here. Though there are many differences between facts and fiction here, according to Maryann Carver the life portrayed here is in many ways similar to the Carvers' own during the period (306–08); Maryann was then living on and off with her own boyfriend, as is Edna in the story, and yet when she was asked to come help Carver she decided to break up with the boyfriend in order to move in with Carver in Mckinleyville. Though virtually no critic seems to have interpreted the story in any positive light before[8], the setting itself, then, fully supports the kind of positive reading I will give.[9] Fiction and autobiography here merge together beautifully in a subtle balance to make a truthful account of his dramatic recovery.

After spending a carefree summer in a low-rent house alone together again, a re-united couple is suddenly forced to leave the house; its generous owner named (strongly evocative of the actual setting) Chef, wants his daughter, who is in a serious trouble with her husband,

to move in there. This of course shocks them, yet the unexpected display of tender fatherhood on Chef's part inevitably compels, in turn, the couple to face squarely the impending problem of their life, which they have been trying to ignore during the happy summer: the all-but-ruined relationship with *their own* children. Presently, the children are respectively living on their own after a life severely wrecked because of their father's alcoholism, which clearly reflects Carver's own situation around 1977. The couple, the initial shock having subsided, begins to talk about them as follows:

> ...Wes [the husband] said he wished he could do it [the life with their children] over again and do it right this time.
>
> They [the children] love you, I [Edna, the wife] said.
>
> No, they don't, he said.
>
> I said, Someday, they'll understand things.
>
> Maybe, Wes said. But it won't matter then.
>
> You don't know, I said.
>
> I know a few things, Wes said, and looked at me. I know I'm glad you came up here. I won't forget you did it, Wes said. (*Where* 301)

Here, the husband seems to feel far more guilt toward their children than the wife so that he cannot continue the dialogue about their children any further than this; he abruptly changes the subject to an easier one, the happy summer they spent alone together. Edna, in comparison, seems to have been taking the relationship with the children easier than Wes, judging from the fact that she can sign her letters to them with the words "Love always" (*Where* 299), whereas Wes has never even written any letter to them; we can imagine here that the more genuine his love is toward his children, the guiltier he feels for his past misdemeanors, making it eventually harder for him to verbally express it. Indeed, in the ensuing dialogue Wes says, "I am who I am," seemingly a little too adamantly in response to Edna's casual question, "Suppose nothing had ever happened .... Then what?" (*Where* 301).

This merely puzzles Edna, because here she only expects from him a casual reply. Yet in fact, this statement of Wes's is also evidence enough of his strong sense of responsibility toward his children, whom he irrevocably hurt through his own alcoholism; he is who he is, after all, the very one who created the misery and sufferings for their children. He thinks he should not look away from the hard fact.

What is most important for us in this story is, however, that the tripartite trans-generational continuity we discussed in "Bicycles" is breathtakingly established through a vision, coming not to the husband but to the wife, immediately after the dialogue quoted above. She can have the vision probably because they could, after spending the summer of sobriety alone together and witnessing Chef's open display of his genuinely tender fatherhood, finally talk about *their own* children:

> Wes, it's all right, I said. I brought his hand to my cheek. Then, I don't know, I remembered how he was when he was nineteen, the way he looked running across this field to where his dad had sat on a tractor, hand over his eyes, watching Wes run toward him. We'd just driven up from California. I got out with Cheryl and Bobby and said, There's Grandpa. But they were just babies. (*Where* 302)

Peter J. Donahue made a mistake of generalizing too much out of a particular case when he argued, evaluating the general importance of dialogue in alcoholics' recovery process, that "[t] he content of the narratives produced in the story ["Where I'm Calling From"] is not as important as the fact that language is always being generated" (60), for what really matters here as much as in "Where" is never the mere fact that they are talking about something at all but *exactly what* they are talking about. What is modestly projected here is, in short, love in its strongest ties: the husband's genuine love toward his father intuitionally grasped, and further strengthened, through the wife's just as genuine love toward the husband, as in a striking comparison with the situation in "Boxes." Looking back on our discussion of "Bicycles" we

may say that Edna here has intuitionally understood *who her husband really is*, probably for the first time in her life, through the one outstanding visual image that crystallizes the essence of his entire being. After Edna suddenly remembers this far-reaching scene, in which is established a perfect visual image of a three-generation Familial Holy Trinity (consisting of Wes's father, Wes, Edna, and their children presumably in her arms), she thinks, "We have to do something now and do it quick" (*Where* 302). Critics have unanimously agreed that the "something" here signifies Edna's giving up on Wes, concluding that the couple here is merely at a loss for what to do from now; however, we, having progressed in our discussion thus far, can never miss the positive implication inherent in her remark: the subject is not "I" but "we."

She must be thinking here, almost as if faithfully following *our* line of thinking in this paper, as follows: if Wes truly loved his father, then in a fundamental way he must have been desperately wanting to be like his father, a father who was genuinely loved by his son. In short, Edna now realizes, through intuiting how much Wes loved his own father, that the main cause of his alcoholism is his love and concomitant guilt toward his children Cheryl and Bobby, as is understood in a striking comparison with his happy experience with his own father. This will fully explain Edna's enigmatic statement, immediately after Wes just as enigmatically says "Fat Linda," that she is sure he is not referring to Chef's danghter (*Where* 302); what she says she "knew" (*Where* 302) here is that when he mentions Linda's nickname he is in fact struggling with the painful memories, not of *Chef's child* Linda of course, but of *his own children* Cheryl and Bobby. Indeed, Wes is throughout the scene toward the end deeply thinking about something; we are here witnessing a relentless drama of repression and consciousness enacted in a delicately oscillating syntax of silence, and what is truly moving for us, if at all, is that here Edna sympathetically understands all of this through her love toward Wes.

Thus, though the text never reveals what exactly will happen next, we logically understand now that what she decides to do here is to help

Wes, in some way or other, try to re-establish a good relationship with his children, in which he could be a part in the perfect Familial Holy Trinity: a relationship including not only the son but also the daughter, and most importantly for us, the wife. Though we do not know whether or not the attempt will succeed, we are sure at least that the actual recovery process from alcoholism for Wes is, thus, probably, already *half* finished, with the unflagging love from his wife. The fact that the next piece to "Chef's House" in *Where* is "Fever," which portrays a husband entering a new period of his life, is suggestive for us here: he takes care of his children with sustained help from a middle-sitter female baby-sitter and his wife, who now lives apart with another man.

The difference between "Bicycles" and "Chef's House" is that the vision embodied in the latter is evidently the more mature and all-encompassing in terms of gender. Without the wife's collaboration and understanding, Wes, just as the narrator in "Where," could never be even aware of any of his own problems, helpless under the weight of his tremendous guilt towards his children. We can speculate here that in writing the earlier story Carver might have thought that to successfully set up a male continuum of three generations would be sufficient to counter a father's nicotine addiction; now, in 1981, after he actually buckled under and nevertheless could successfully kick alcoholism through Maryann's understanding and devotion in 1977, he looks back and thinks that a conviction that he is truly loved by his wife and children just as he loved his own father was what was actually necessary to abandon his alcoholism.

This conviction—the *second* "revelation" we discussed in section 2—must have given Carver the very sense of security he desperately craved in his alcohol-infused years, helping expand his outlook on his own life and pushing the fictional world he would create toward the direction it actually took. In "Elephant," a story written a year before his death in 1987, the narrator, heavily weighed down by innumerable financial solicitations from many of his relatives, has two dreams, one of which is about when he rode on the shoulders of his father:

.... I had this dream one night. Two dreams, really. I dreamt them on the same night. In the first dream, my dad was alive once more, and he was giving me a ride on his shoulders. I was this little kid, maybe five or six years old. *Get up here*, he said, and took me by the hands and swung me onto his shoulders. I was high off the ground, but I wasn't afraid. He was holding on to me. We were holding on to each other. Then he began to move down the sidewalk. I brought my hands up from his shoulders and put them around his forhead. *Don't muss my hair*, he said. *You can let go*, he said, *I've got you. You won't fall.* When he said that, I became aware of the strong grip of his hands around my ankles. Then I did let go. (*Where* 485–86)

The narrator here goes on to add that the second dream was a horrible one about his former wife and his son, in which he threatened to kill the latter. He says: "In the second dream, somebody had offered me some whisky, and I drank it. Drinking that whisky was the thing that scared me. That was the worst thing that could have happened" (487). The story mildly suggests that he determines to bear as many responsibilities as possible for his relatives on account of what these dreams miraculously inspires in him: the true value of fatherhood. What is implied here for us will, at this point in our discussion, no longer need any further explication.

Conclusion

Carver's actual relationship with his children in the early years, especially the son, is shrouded in mystery, because Carver never offered any detailed account as to the subject; yet according to his public comments it seems never to have been an easy one, supposedly full of violence and guilt. This is inferable, for example, from the fact that the son never appears in person in Carver's semi-biography in which his daughter Chris and his ex-wife Maryann both offered, though sometimes reluctantly, much informative first-hand accounts of their lives

with Raymond Carver. A passage from "The Compartment" directly depicts a difficult father-son relationship strongly evocative, though of course fictionally, of Carver's actual experience with his own son:

> The last time Myers had seen his son, the boy had lunged for him during a violent quarrel. Myers's wife had been standing by the sideboard, dropping one dish of china after the other onto the dining-room floor. Then she'd gone on to the cups. "That's enough," Myers had said, and at that instant the boy charged him .... He [Myers] slammed him [his son] into the wall and threatened to kill him. (*Cathedral* 48–49)

As it turned out, the relationship seems to have recovered in his later years, as is shown in his interview in 1984: "I have my children now, and I know them now on this basis in this new life" (Gentry and Stull 97). However, if the relationship between Carver and his son was once actually as volatile as the above quotation suggests, then not only Carver's fictional treatment of it but also even his own psychological negotiation with it must accordingly have been extremely difficult, as is amply suggested in the case of Myers's recalcitrant defense mechanism dramatized in "The Compartment": he inconsiderately and foolishly blames his son for the breakup of his marriage. As is portrayed in "Chef's House," if Carver truly loved his children, it must have been all the more difficult for him to express his love even in fictional terms. Yet, fiction-writing in general could sometimes be a kind of desperate act to come to terms with a writer's own existentially critical situation; indeed, the idea of chronicling and talking about one's own past as a form of cure is emphasized especially in "Fever," and Carver himself commented that fiction-writing was for him an "act of discovery" (*Fires* 25). Though the comment is specifically about plot-lines, this can of course be taken symbolically: he discovered what really ailed him through the act of fiction-writing.

Alcoholism, according to recent medical scholarship, is in fact brought about by many socio-cultural, psychological, medical, or

genetic factors, all of which are in most cases too deeply intertwined with each other to specifically untangle; yet, consulting his fiction, especially the stories I discussed in this paper, we as literary critics can imaginatively speculate with ample textual evidence what the most poignant reasons for his dramatic recovery from alcoholism were. Though this was a specifically private problem for Carver, to be sure, on a symbolic level this is also a general problem of how to interpret and relate to one's own past cultural heritage and to transfer them to future generations, especially in such a socio-cultural landscape as America. I hope, in the course of my speculative attempts here, to have contributed to cultivating the soil of Hopelessville, where, though usually littered with the dark ruins of the American Dream, a different kind of dreamlight is always distantly showing.

NOTES

[1] As to the discussion of Carver's fictional approach to Catholicism, see Bethea (160).

[2] A thorough inquiry, which I regrettably cannot conduct here because of limited space, into a number of Carver's stories ranging from the very first to the last ones —for example "Sixty Acres," "Distance," "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?," "Fling," "The Calm," "A Small Good Thing," "Chef's House," "Where I'm Calling From," "Boxes," "Elephants," or "Errands," to name only the most apparent instances—would amply demonstrate that he was all throughout his career very much obsessed with the transmission of the father's legacy, physical or spiritual, to the son/daughter, and sometimes the son/daughter's difficulty to transfer it to his own son/daughter in turn. Indeed, in Carver's fiction, when the father's attempt to transmit some legacy (often something concerning the grandfather) to the son/daughter succeeds at all, a kind of "epiphany" is usually brought into the fictional world; when not, the father will drift apart into a meaningless universe all alone, the most conspicuous case of which will be that of Myers in "The Compartment." He cannot fully recognize until the very end how he himself in fact desperately needs communication with his son. Even in those stories in which no son/daughter or grandfather appear, in this context, their presence might possibly be always lurking under the surface of texts. As to the discussion of how the theme of transmission of father's values to his child (ren) lies at the heart of Carver's fiction, see Goto's "A Child Happens: As to the Reading Experience of Raymond Carver" (77–94).

[3] Myers writes, half conscious of the story's underlying structure, that "the father is the one who really learns the lesson here, as he comes to better understand the

passage of generations within a family." Nevertheless, he does not expand any further than this on the "lesson," the "cross-generational connections" he definitely refers to, stating that "he [Hamilton] realizes that the boy, in his later years, will most likely lose this idealized view of his father," referring to Roger's expressions of his tender feelings toward his father in his bedroom as something that will inevitably disappear with the passage of time (58). In my view, his interpretation is insufficient in that he fails to notice the immense impact of Hamilton's father's fighting image on Hamilton's mind, ending up ignoring the fact that Hamilton could quit smoking at all.

[4] My intention here is never to criticize Carver for being misogynistic; what is significant for us is, rather, that through the memory of "the man" who happens to be his own father, Hamilton urgently understands, as if in a violent dose of misogynistic revelation, the sheer weight of being alive as a "man."

[5] Runyon comments that "'rolling' in any case becomes, if only for a moment, the most important act, or character, at this point in Carver's book" (73) referring to *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, yet will not go any further than merely pointing out the fact.

[6] Most critics treating the theme of alcoholism and his recovery in Carver's fiction approach the problem abstractly in terms of the general importance of communication between the alcoholics, as is observed among the participants of the AA meetings. In "Alcoholism as Ideology in Raymond Carver's 'Careful' and 'Where I'm Calling From,'" Peter J. Donahue, for example, contrasts isolationist Lloyd in "Careful" with the talking alcoholics in "Where I'm Calling From," arguing that Lloyd's willing insularity further reinforces his alcoholism; the alcoholics' conversation in "Where I'm Calling From" is essential to their recoveries because it "disrupts the ideology of alcoholism by preventing the characters from becoming verbally isolated" (60).

[7] Furuya implies that the existence of his children is deeply related to his alcoholism, quoting the passage from *Fires* that I also quoted in section 1. His discussion is convincing enough when he claims that what the narrator in "Where" has to do to cure himself of his alcoholism is to bid "farewell to his past self" (107). In his opinion, what the narrator has to admit is that he does not love his children anymore. However, his argument seems somewhat shaky in trying to emphasize the importance of the act of farewell-bidding, a little too hastily assuming that Carver's love for his children disappeared completely at one time in his life, quoting the case of Myers in "The Compartment." Myers, in my opinion, loves his son poignantly, even though he never allows himself to recognize the fact.

[8] A typical reading holds that "[1]ike 'Feathers,' 'Chef's House' presents the possibility of redemption and recovery for the main characters, only to take it away" (Meyer 128).

[9] Hiraishi argues that the story centers on the love between Wes and Edna (170); yet he never takes it into consideration that what they are thinking about in the latter part of the story is less about themselves than about their children.

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